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SUBJECT: Nigerian Expert: When Only 6 Out of 100 Kids Complete Grade School, Private Education Must Play Role

¶1. (U) Summary: With only 6 out of 100 children completing primary school, Dr. Doyin Salami, a respected economist and faculty member at the prestigious Lagos Business School, believes the Government of Nigeria (GON) must change its model for delivering education to a public-private partnership. Under the new model, the Federal Government (FG) would establish curriculum, state governments would regulate physical plant, and private for-profit or non-profit entities deliver the educational services. End Summary

¶2. (U) Econoffs met March 3 with Dr. Doyin Salami, a respected economist and faculty member at the prestigious Lagos Business School. With macroeconomic stability well in hand, Dr. Salami said, it is time for the government to turn its attention to micro-economic elements. Education is currently the single biggest challenge facing the current administration in Nigeria, and a key reason for Nigeria's massive unemployment problem, he said.

Nigeria's Unemployed Are Unemployable

¶3. (U) Nigeria's unemployed are in fact unemployable by virtue of their lack of an adequate education, Dr. Salami said. A 2006 survey done in Lagos State by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) illustrates the magnitude of the problem. The survey showed that out of every 100 children, 67 do not start primary school, and of the 33 that do start, only six finish. From this, Dr. Salami says, one can infer that not all six will make it through high school or go on to university. Because 40 percent of Nigeria's 140 million population is below the age of 15 years, the problem is enormous, Dr. Salami said. Most of the children who are not in school are working as street vendors or in markets, he said.

Educating Nigeria Not
Solely a GON Responsibility

¶4. (U) In light of the failures of the public education model illustrated by the 2006 survey, there is a need to change the model. Dr. Salami believes that the business of educating Nigeria can no longer be left to the public sector. Had the former Minister of Education (now World Bank Vice President) stayed in her job, changing public school education might have been possible, but Dr. Salami believes that, in her absence, the political will is lacking to carry out the reforms needed. Moreover, he said, education is currently entirely dependent on the budget, and there is not enough money being provided.

¶5. (U) Therefore, Dr. Salami is advocating adoption of a public-private partnership model for the education sector. The

model Salami believes is most likely to succeed is one in which the Federal Government of Nigeria (GON) plays a strong regulatory role, but the private sector actually carries out the activities related to education.

GON to Assume Purely Regulatory Role

¶16. (U) Under the model Dr. Salami envisages, the Federal Government's (FG) role would be to develop a basic school curriculum that would be required in all states with some variances permitted to accommodate important cultural and regional values, including religious values. State governments would regulate the type and quality of the infrastructure, including school buildings, he said. The schools themselves, Dr. Salami said, would be run by private for-profit or non-profit entities. These entities would operate the schools, recruit teachers and maintain the infrastructure to ensure standard and quality, Salami advised.

¶17. (U) The new model would help to professionalize the teacher corps, he said. Teaching is now the profession of last resort, he said; families do not send their brightest children into education. The new model would change that by assuring that teachers are well compensated. In addition to attracting higher quality personnel, adequate compensation would go a long way toward forestalling the resistance of the teachers' unions toward privatizing the administration of the public schools, he predicted.

¶18. (U) A debate on the important issue of education needs to be ignited within Nigeria, he said. Dr. Salami sees as a key argument in the debate that the GON does not have the resources with which to provide adequate education for all children, and therefore must assure that the resources it does have are well spent. He anticipates that the regulatory role envisaged for the Ministry of

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Education, which would necessitate the laying off of many redundant civil servants, would also be a focal point of the debate.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: Dr. Salami, an influential economist with the prestigious Lagos Business School, is actively advocating that the GON adopt this policy approach to education.

¶10. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.

Blair